

Mr. GUTIERREZ. That money should be saving lives, not ending them.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. GUTIERREZ. That is why I demand the FBI and the Attorney General investigate.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman will suspend.

Members are reminded to direct their remarks to the Chair and not to a perceived viewing audience.

INNOVATIVE APPRENTICESHIPS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. FERGUSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. FERGUSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the PARTNERS Act, legislation I am introducing this morning with my friend, Representative BONAMICI from Oregon.

Our bill would establish a grant program to support the creation and expansion of innovative apprenticeships that prepare our workers for 21st century careers.

In the Third District of Georgia, the CEC in Newnan has led Georgia by implementing an apprenticeship model, and since then, we have seen apprenticeships continue to expand across our great State.

I, along with Ms. BONAMICI, are introducing the PARTNERS Act today to bring more programs like this to students and workers across the Nation.

By funding this grant with already existing H1-B visa fees, which are collected from foreign visa applicants, we are ensuring that workers can receive immediate work-based training at no cost to the American taxpayer.

APPRENTICESHIPS AND WORK-BASED LEARNING PROGRAMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Oregon (Ms. BONAMICI) for 5 minutes.

Ms. BONAMICI. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be on the floor this morning to introduce bipartisan legislation with my colleague on the Education and Workforce Committee, Congressman DREW FERGUSON from Georgia.

Our bill, Promoting Apprenticeships Through Regional Training Networks for Employers' Required Skills Act, or PARTNERS Act, will help close the skills gap by increasing opportunities for small- and medium-sized businesses to establish apprenticeships and work-based learning programs.

When I visit communities in northwest Oregon, I hear from many Oregonians who still feel left behind because they don't have the skills they need to compete in today's economy. They are not alone. Many jobs today do not require a 4-year degree, but do require more than a high school diploma. In fact, those jobs make up about 53 percent of today's labor market, but only 43 percent of today's workers are trained at this level.

This creates a skills gap, leaving businesses struggling to find workers

with appropriate skills, and workers without meaningful pathways to better paying jobs.

I hear from employers and workforce organizations about the importance of a qualified workforce. They want to identify new opportunities to strengthen skills training.

Apprenticeships and work-based learning programs are a win-win. They provide individuals with paid, on-the-job training and classroom instruction. Employers can align training with the skills they need at their workplaces, and workers can learn while they earn.

Unfortunately, small- and medium-sized businesses often lack the infrastructure and resources to establish apprenticeships or work-based learning programs on their own. So the PARTNERS Act addresses this by establishing a grant program to support the creation and expansion of industry and sector partnerships that will help small- and medium-sized businesses develop work-based learning programs and provide support programs for workers.

Industry and sector partnerships will bring together employers, education, training, labor, and community-based organizations to develop work-based learning programs that benefit workers and the economy as a whole.

In Oregon, these partnerships could address, for example, workforce development needs in rapidly growing sectors like healthcare and technology.

Under the PARTNERS Act, the partnerships would use grant funds to recruit workers, develop training curriculum, and provide workers with access to tools, work attire, transportation, childcare services, and mentorship support. These support services help businesses retain employees and help workers balance caring for and providing for their families.

Importantly, Mr. Speaker, this bill results in no additional cost to taxpayers because it authorizes the use of 50 percent of the funds deposited in the H1-B nonimmigrant petition account, and these will be used by the Department of Labor for the partnership grants. This funding source was suggested by the administration in a June 2017 executive order on apprenticeships.

Through stronger investments and work-based learning programs, we can build pathways to get more people back to work, to provide our Nation's businesses with the workforce that will improve productivity and efficiency.

I thank Mr. FERGUSON for his leadership, and I urge my colleagues to join us in supporting this bipartisan legislation that will help people in our districts across the country access good jobs.

TAX REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, today we will begin a journey that has

been represented to be a lifeline for the American people in long awaited tax reform.

Sad to say that this is not a bipartisan bill. In addition, it is a bill that will cause a great deal of challenge to the American people.

For example, in moving firms across the ocean, overseas, the American people should know that those companies, in the construct of this bill, will cause them to be exempt from taxes forever.

In a discussion this morning, I heard that it will not boost the economy. The American people should know that it will destroy, undermine, crush the economy.

The representation of the level of growth is a misnomer. Take, for example, in 1986, in the tax reform, there was no surge in job creation after the Reagan tax cuts. There was no high numbers of blossoming jobs. Many in my congressional district need jobs.

It will be borrowing from the future and it will be a burden on our children, our children's children, and their children. But the most devastating part is the bill that we will be paying, the actual dollars to pay down the deficit.

Of course, it should be known that we have examples that no jobs will be created. In 2004, for example, when there was a repatriation from companies regarding their taxes, there was no creation of jobs that we can even recognize. Most of the money went for stock buybacks.

Now, I know that sounds completely technical, but let me be very clear. The question has to be: What will the middle class working families get?

I can assure you, it will be close to zero.

There are 2 million households, for example, in the State of Texas that will be impacted by not allowing the exemption of State and local taxes. We don't know whether mortgage deductions will be allowed, charitable tax credits. So if you have in some way been deducting, for example, those State and local taxes, you will not be able to do them anymore. That will be a great burden on the working families of America.

So my caution to the business community as well as the small businesses, families: Be very careful what you buy into. We will have discussions to provide you with that detailed analysis. The key is a distribution table. What and whom will get the most money.

As the bill is presently written, middle class working families, don't look for relief in the Ryan-McConnell tax bill. It will all go to the top 1 percent. They will relish while, you might not be jealous, but you will certainly be poorer for it.

OPIOID CRISIS

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I want to also entertain the questions about the pending opioid announcement of this White House. I want to bring to the attention the article in The New Yorker on the empire of pain.

I am working on these issues, but I realize that this has to be a comprehensive approach to opioid abuse.

The Purdue company launched OxyContin with a marketing campaign that attempted to counter this attitude and change the prescribing habits of doctors.

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Many people know OxyContin. The company funded research and paid doctors to make the case that concerns about opioid addiction were overblown and that OxyContin would safely treat an ever-wider range of maladies. Sales representatives marketed OxyContin as a product to start with and to stay with. Remember that. A product to start with and to stay with.

Millions of patients found the drug to be a vital salve for excruciating pain, but many others grew so hooked on it, that between doses they experienced debilitating withdrawal.

If we are going to do real opioid reform, this must be a standup of the pharmaceutical companies, and they cannot be defended.

In addition, we have to understand that those languishing in jail that have suffered from criminal penalties for crack cocaine—crack—there now should be a compromise for their release. Opioid reform must include all of the neighborhoods of America, not just some.

JENNIFER KEPNER WAS MOST COURAGEOUS AND INSPIRING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. RUIZ) for 5 minutes.

Mr. RUIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the life and legacy of a wonderful person, an incredible wife, loving mother, exceptional citizen, and one of our Nation's finest servicemembers, Jennifer Kepner.

Jennifer passed away on October 18, 2017, at the young age of 39. She lived in my congressional district in Cathedral City, California. My heart breaks for her family and loved ones. She is, by far, one of the most courageous and inspiring people I have ever met. She put family, country, and community before self.

At 23, Jennifer answered the call to serve our Nation as a medic and a staff sergeant in the United States Air Force. She served for 6 years, from 2001 to 2007, and helped save countless lives on the battlefield.

After being honorably discharged at the rank of staff sergeant, Jenn continued her life of service, helping patients in our local communities as a radiology technician at Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs.

She led a healthy and full life in so many ways. Her many hobbies included CrossFit, hiking, camping with her family, quilting, and even painting.

All who met her remember her love of country, her determined spirit, her passion for serving others, and her devotion to family.

Despite her healthy lifestyle and no other risks, in 2016, Jennifer was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, a terrifying diagnosis for anyone, let alone a young mother.

After exhaustive work to investigate the potential causes of her cancer, her oncologist linked Jennifer's exposure to burn pits in Iraq as the only identifiable and plausible risk for her cancer.

Burn pits are commonly used by the military to eliminate waste in Iraq and Afghanistan. The large burn pit at Balad Air Base in Iraq, where Jennifer was stationed for 6 months in 2006, covered 10 acres and burned over 240 tons of trash each day, including everything from computer parts, medical waste, plastics, and chemicals; some items we wouldn't allow to be burned in open air in our neighborhoods here in the United States. Yet, in a crowded camp of thousands, our men and women in uniform are exposed to giant plumes of black smoke.

After learning of the potential link between her exposure while she served our great Nation and her cancer, she went to the VA seeking answers and help. After being denied medical assistance and benefits from the VA initially, Jennifer reached out to the advocacy group Burn Pits 360 and my office.

Along with others, and as a team, we helped her navigate the complicated VA process, cut through the red tape, and get her the benefits that she had earned.

I visited Jennifer at her home. During our kitchen table talk, she told me about her daily struggle raising two small children while battling pancreatic cancer. She was brave and had an optimistic attitude.

She told me what it was like living every day in Iraq right next to the burn pits—the smoke, the smell, the irritated cough, and the sickness that followed.

Her main concern was to ensure her husband and children were going to be okay after she passed. Her second concern was for her fellow veterans who, like her, were exposed to burn pits. She wanted to bring awareness to what she called “the Agent Orange of our generation.” Imagine that. During the toughest battle of her life against an aggressive cancer, she elevated her family and fellow veterans above herself. Her advocacy was for us to prevent future exposure to burn pits and serve veterans who have already been exposed.

That is why we are here, to honor Jennifer and fight for her, her family, and fellow veterans. We must find a solution. Unfortunately, it is too late for Jennifer, but we can fight in her honor.

I was there with Jenn; her husband, Ben; children, Aida and Wyatt, at her bedside hours before she passed away, and I am honored to call Ben my friend.

On behalf of my wife, Monica, the 36th Congressional District, and our entire Nation, we join together as a

community to grieve with you, Ben, little Aida and Wyatt, and to honor your wife, your mother, and the life of Jennifer Kepner. We are awed and humbled by Jennifer's life of patriotism and service, and her life and her love of family.

Jennifer, we thank you for your service and sacrifice.

Mr. Speaker, Jennifer's memory will never be forgotten.

A CIRCUIT BREAKER IS NEEDED FOR PROPOSED TAX CUTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, the exercise my Republican friends are going through with their budget and tax cut proposal would be amusing if the consequences were not so serious.

Coming to Congress, I worked hard to earn a position on the House Ways and Means Committee, which has been the focal point for critical decisions in the past dealing with tax reform, with Social Security. I respected its historic role and the way that its members worked together in a thoughtful and bipartisan basis.

Unfortunately, unlike what has happened for other major tax reform efforts, currently there has been no effort for laying the groundwork, working with people in both parties, dealing with the hard decisions that are necessary for tax reform that will move our country forward. My Republican friends refuse to deal with the heavy legislative lifting necessary for true reform.

In fact, my Republican friends now have given up on tax reform. They are rushing through, in a matter of days, not reform but as big a tax cut as they can possibly get, predicated on strong-arming their Members with narrow control in Congress and disregarding the fundamentals of responsible budgeting.

The budget resolution that the House will soon be considering by the Republicans to enact their tax cut via the process known as reconciliation is a fantasy. Read it carefully. It is predicated on increasing our national debt \$1.5 trillion, when previously they promised that their tax reform would be budget neutral.

It is predicated on \$4 trillion of unspecified budget cuts that will be concentrated on Medicare, Medicaid, and the other programs that Americans care the most deeply about.

The proof for this fantasy is the fact that even though Republicans have an ironclad grip on the appropriations process in both the House and the Senate and they don't have to worry about filibusters, they don't need any Democratic votes at all, but they still cannot summon the courage of their convictions to implement the beginning of this strategy.

It doesn't have to wait for 2 or 4 or 10 years. They could start now with the